

Fly strike in rabbits

Overview

Fly strike is when fly eggs on a rabbit's fur hatch into maggots and burrow under the skin to feed on flesh. It's a very serious condition that can cause death.

Flies prefer to lay their eggs in areas of wet, warm fur, such as around the base of your rabbit's tail - especially if there has been a build-up of droppings or urine.

Contact your vet immediately for an emergency appointment if you suspect your rabbit has fly strike - the sooner your rabbit is seen by a vet the better their chance of survival.



Symptoms

- Patches of wet fur
- Maggots visible around back end
- Bad smell
- Being quieter than usual
- Not eating (anorexia)
- Diarrhoea / soft pellets
- Collapse
- Death

When to contact your vet

Contact your vet immediately for an emergency appointment if you notice any of the symptoms above or suspect your rabbit has fly strike.

You know your rabbit best. If they don't have the symptoms listed above but you are still concerned it's always best to contact your vet.

Causes

Bad hygiene

- If your rabbit or their living space is dirty, flies will be attracted to them.
- Always keep your rabbit and their environment clean.

Poor diet

- A bad diet can lead to diarrhoea which will stick to your rabbit's fur and attract flies.

Wounds

- Open wounds will attract flies to lay eggs.

Illness

- If your rabbit is unwell, moving less or unable to clean themselves properly flies are will be more successful in laying eggs in their fur.
- This is common in overweight rabbits, rabbits with dental problems, arthritis or any other type of pain.

Fly strike is more of a problem in the summer when flies are the most active.

Treatment

Cleaning and removing maggots

- All maggots need to be removed, this is a painful process and is usually done under sedation or general anaesthetic.

Insecticides

- Insecticides will be given to kill any remaining maggots.

A drip

- If your rabbit has become very poorly, they may need to stay in hospital for fluids to be given.

Antibiotics

- Antibiotics aren't always necessary but might be given if your rabbit has developed an infection due to fly strike.

Pain relief

- Your vet is likely to give your rabbit pain relief because flystrike is very painful.

Treat the underlying cause.

- Your vet will try to find out why your rabbit has developed fly strike and help you prevent it happening again. This may involve treating any health issues that have prevented your rabbit grooming, such as tooth problems, arthritis or spinal problems.
- If you are feeding a poor diet your vet will advise you how to improve it.

Ongoing care

Depending how severe the problem is, your rabbit may need to stay at your vet practice for monitoring and further medication. If / when your rabbit goes home, you will need to finish any medication that's been started and regularly bathe their sore skin.

Outlook

Fly strike is a very serious, often life-threatening condition. Your rabbit has the best chance of survival if it's discovered and treated quickly. Sadly, it's often fatal because of the severe damage maggots cause.

If your rabbit becomes very poorly because of flystrike you may need to consider the difficult decision of putting them to sleep.

Prevention

Cleanliness

- Make sure your rabbit and their environment stays clean throughout the year.

- Check your rabbit's bottom daily, especially in summer.
- Be aware of any health problems and how these may affect your rabbit's ability to groom.

Insecticide/repellent sprays and lotions

- Treatment is usually necessary before fly- season. Spot-on or pour-on liquids will be available from your veterinary practices.

Diet

- Feed a balanced diet that's high in fibre.

Monitor toileting and pellets

- Contact your vet for an appointment if you notice any changes in your rabbit's toileting habits, especially soft droppings.

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